DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 333 037 TM 016 547

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TITLE The Evaluation Center Cube: A Classification Tool.
PUB DATE Apr 91
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, April 3-7, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classification; *Community Programs; Early Intervention; Evaluation Methods; *Models; *Program Evaluation; *Research Methodology
IDENTIFIERS *Evaluation Center Cube; *Graphic Representation; Kellogg Foundation

ABSTRACT

An evaluation tool, the Evaluation Center Cube (ECC), is presented as a vehicle for establishing an analytic framework and uniting evaluation strategies. The ECC was developed in response to the Kellogg Foundation's need to categorize community-initiated funding proposals. As a classification tool, it facilitates proposal analysis and is comprehensive in encompassing the array of what normally would be windows of opportunity for interventions to benefit youth. The three-dimensional logical structure considers projects by: (1) age; (2) developmental area; and (3) community system providing the service. There are nine age categories and seven developmental domains. The community systems dimension contains eight sub-dimensions: (1) religious; (2) education; (3) justice; (4) public works; (5) economic development; (6) health services; (7) social services; and (8) housing. The ECC represents the first step in needs assessment, information dissemination regarding existing community based programs, and analysis of newspaper coverage of youth programs. It provides an easily understood graphic depiction of beneficiaries of foundation funding, and it may provide a model for other organizations evaluating programs. The ECC is illustrated in figure 1. (SLD)

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The Evaluation Center Cube: A Classification Tool

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For presentation and discussion
at the 1991 AERA annual meeting
Chicago, Il., April 6, 1991

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The Evaluation Center Cube: A Classification Tool

The Kellogg Youth Initiatives Program (KYIP), funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Michigan began in 1988. KYIP is a broad-aim social program across three sites in Michigan: Alger and Marquette Counties in the remote Upper Peninsula, a section of Detroit bounded by the Northern High School attendance area and Calhoun County, a county consisting of small to medium size cities and rural areas. KYIP has been conceptualized by the Foundation as "a long-term commitment to assist Michigan communities in addressing the needs of youth. Its primary goal is to improve the quality of life in which they can best develop and grow. A secondary goal, in the best interest of youth everywhere, is to create program models which can be adapted by other towns, cities, or regions" (Youth Initiatives Program Booklet, 1988, p.2).

The Evaluation Center at Western Michigan

University is under contract to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to evaluate the Kellogg Youth Initiatives Program in each of the three target areas.

The Kellogg Foundation's long-term commitment to the three target regions, and the encouragement and nurturing of local resources has facilitated uncovering needs and developing and implementing grass-roots initiatives to address local issues. The Kellogg Youth Development Seminars (KYDS), have been the primary vehicle by the Foundation to enhance and develop local resources. The purpose of KYDS is to promote leadership skills, increase local knowledge of exemplary youth programs, engender collaboration among human service providers and develop skills in needs assessment, program evaluation and proposal writing. KYDS is one of over sixty programs funded by the Foundation over the three years of the Kellogg Youth Initiatives Program.

The evaluation of this broad-aim social program has presented The Evaluation Center with unique and

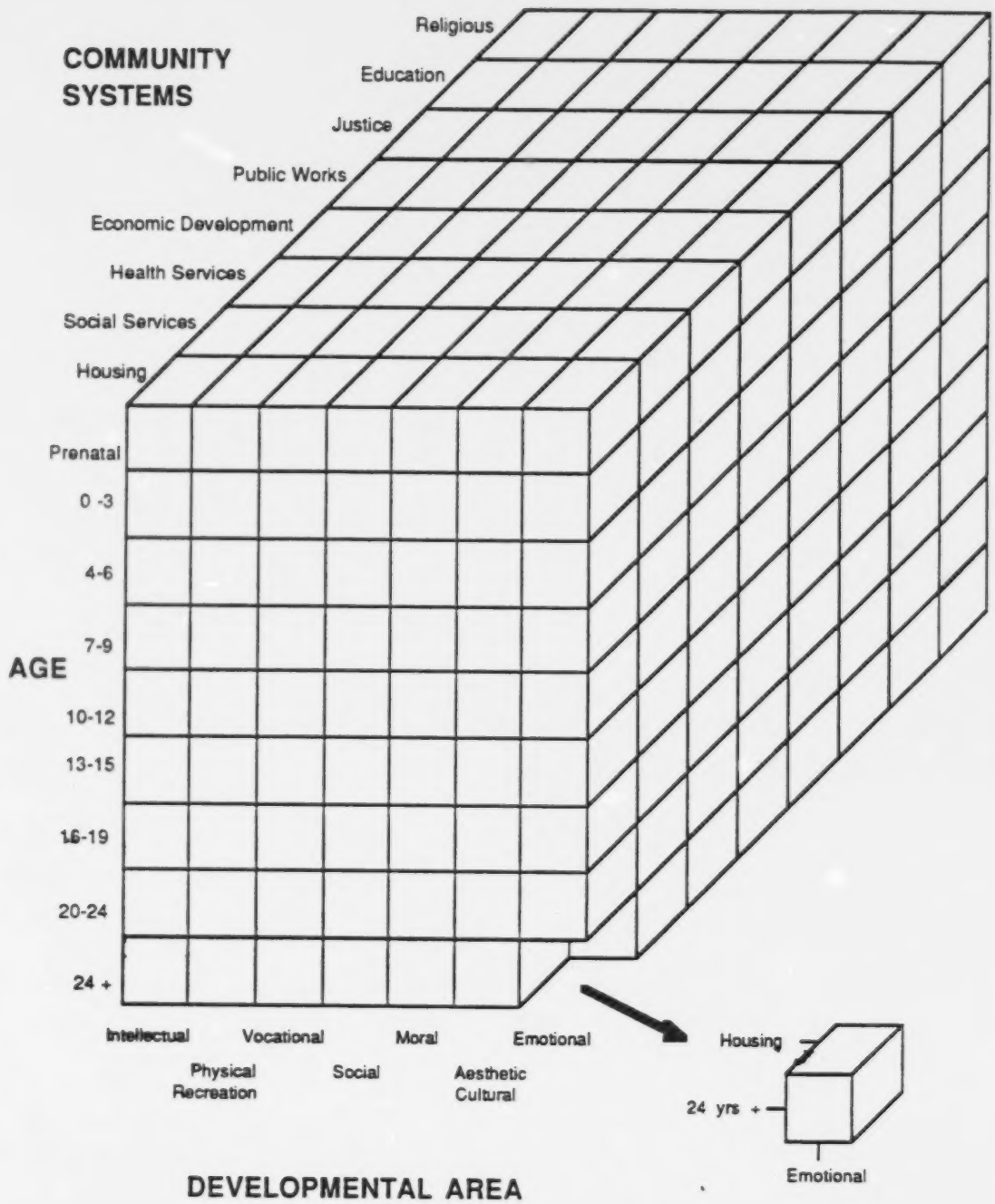
challenging opportunities. These challenges have led to the development of methods of inquiry and evaluation that will accurately assess the outcomes of Kellogg Foundation supported community-based youth development programs. These methods can then be used to provide formative evaluation feedback to the Kellogg Foundation regarding community needs and to direct funding priorities.

Weiss and Rein (1983, p.143) define broad-aim social programs as "programs that hope to achieve nonspecific forms of change for the better and which also, because of their ambition and magnitude, involve unstandardized large scale interventions." The breadth, scope, lofty ambitions and the foundation's commitment to unique and innovative youth-related programming concepts are exciting, potentially precedent setting and may serve as a prototype for future social programs. KYIP is arguably a broad-aim social program and as such has necessitated several complementing evaluation approaches.

Some of the strategies used in the KYIP evaluation include demographic data collection and analysis for the each of the three target and comparison areas, analysis of newspaper articles addressing youth issues, analysis of proposals both funded and denied funding by the Foundation and a study conducted in Year 2 of the evaluation to identity existing community youth programs in each of the target areas. There are other evaluation strategies used, however they will not be mentioned here.

The purpose of this paper is to present one tool, the Evaluation Center Cube, (see attachment #1) as a vehicle for establishing an analytic framework and uniting evaluation strategies together in a way that provides structure and a consistent language for analyzing and categorizing findings and providing feedback to the foundation. "Most people need structure and a vision or goal to determine how they can contribute" (1990 KYIP Annual Report, p.27). This structure is provided by the Cube. The Cube may also be used as the first step in a continuum of needs

Figure 1. The Evaluation Center/KYIP Cube



assessment for determining unmet community needs, setting priorities to meet those needs and allocating the appropriate resources for proposal funding.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CUBE

The Cube was developed in response to the Kellogg Foundation's need to categorize community-initiated funding proposals. The Cube is a classification tool that facilitates proposal analyses and is comprehensive in that its categories encompass the array of what normally would be considered to be "windows of opportunity" when an intervention in still maturing youth may make a difference. The three-dimensional logical structure of the Cube considers KYIP funded projects by function of age, developmental area and community system providing the service. The age categories are: prenatal, 0-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10-12, 13-15, 16-19, 20-24, 24+. The developmental dimension of the Cube, adapted from Nowakowski, Bunda, Working, Bernacki and Harrington (1985), consists of the intellectual, physical/recreational, vocational, social, moral, aesthetic/cultural and emotional domains of youth

maturation. Community Systems is the third dimension of the Cube with housing, social services, health services, economic development, public works, justice, education and religion constituting the boxes. Thus, the original intent in developing the Cube was to provide the Foundation with an easily understood, concise and graphic depiction of what constituencies were the beneficiaries of foundation funding.

USE OF THE CUBE

Feedback provided by The Evaluation Center to the Kellogg Foundation, through the use of the Cube, has addressed funding patterns to youth by respective cube categories. Thus, the Cube has served in part, as one step in needs assessment. Stufflebeam, McCormick, Brinkerhoff and Nelson (1985), describe the purposes of needs assessments as planning, identifying and diagnosing problems, assisting in the evaluation of the merit and worth of a program and public relations. The classification of foundation-funded and/or existing community-based programs is only the initial step in

engaging in a needs assessment. Determining what needs assessment process, (discrepancy, democratic, analytic and diagnostic), Stufflebeam, et al. (1985), is left to the proposal authors and funding organizations with input from the evaluation team.

The Cube is only a precursor to a needs assessment and is not as powerful when used in what might be considered simplistically a discrepancy view of comparing existing community programs or foundation funded programs to vacancies in cube modules. According to Stufflebeam, et al. (1983, p.12), "Needs do not exist per se but rather are the outcomes of human judgements, values, and interactions within a given context."

Therefore, while the classification of youth oriented-programs is a necessary condition when considering existing community needs and future funding direction, it is not a sufficient condition for determining needs or making funding decisions. Organizations considering the cube as part of a needs

assessment strategy should consider local context, values, priorities and resource capacity as major issues when conducting needs assessments.

For example, using the Cube to analyze types of programs funded in fiscal year 1990, an emphasis in funding was noted in school-based programs primarily serving adolescent age youth. Further analysis indicates that there was a conspicuous lack of proposals receiving funding in the infant and toddler age groups (0-3 years old) in all target areas. This information was provided to the Foundation to consider what groups were being impacted by current funding decisions, to appraise future funding directions and to amplify the value of local needs assessments.

The application of the Cube with consideration of local context may lead to further questions and more in-depth inquiry; pre-proposal research might reveal that gaps or vacancies exist in Cube boxes. Here are just a few of many possible questions that might be asked about gaps or vacancies:

- Is there a local need in this area and, if so, how pervasive is the need?
- How could the need best be met?
- Does a new system need to be developed to address needs or can an existing one be augmented?
- Are there local resources that may need technical assistance in meeting needs?

Answering these types of questions can only result in better prepared proposals and an improved fit between funding efforts and local needs. The ambitious goal of improving the quality of life for youth in a community involves a multi-faceted approach to assessing and meeting youth needs that is best addressed in an organized and systematic manner. Moreover, the order provided by the Cube encourages a rational approach to determining local needs and making funding decisions.

Evolution and Expansion of the Cube's Uses

The Cube has proven to be a useful complement to the KYIP evaluation in other ways. A survey of the existing services available to youth in each of the four target areas was completed by The Evaluation Center in 1990. The agencies responding to the survey were then classified using the Cube domains of age, developmental area and type of social service organization providing the service. Community survey findings are now able to be used by grant applicants and the foundation as an additional datum in determining unmet community needs.

The publication of the Youth Services Directory, has also resulted from the Cube. The Youth Services Directory, which was disseminated to the Foundation, is a handbook of youth-serving agencies for each target area, that provides indexes of community-based agencies in alphabetical order, community system, developmental area and city within the target where the agency is located. Information regarding client eligibility, contact person, telephone number, type of service provided, hours of operation and fee structure is

contained within the handbook. In this use of the cube, those seeking youth-related services are easily able to determine what services are available for a specific need.

An additional use of the cube has been for the analysis of newspaper articles. Newspapers from each of the three target areas have scanned for articles that relate to youth concerns. These articles have been classified according to cube domains. The newspaper analysis has served to triangulate the other sources of Evaluation Center findings to paint a picture of the individual target areas that are unique and easily discernable. By using the Cube to classify youth-related newspaper articles the Foundation and other stakeholders are able to determine what local trends or themes are emerging or apparent.

Conclusion

The Cube is a valuable evaluation tool that facilitates an orderly mechanism for the classification

and analysis of KYIP proposals, as a first step in a needs assessment, information dissemination regarding existing community based programs, and an analysis of newspaper coverage of youth programs. This description of youth programs has been relied upon by the Foundation in considering needs in highly disparate and unique communities. The value of using a consistent framework for categorizing independent methods of data collection it that it lends itself to an orderly comparison of findings and enhances data-based decision making.

The Cube may prove to be a model classification system for other foundations, schools, human service funders and other community-based organizations when investigating needs and making plans for human infrastructure investment.

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